

BLOGGER ROUNDTABLE INTERVIEW WITH  
LIEUTENANT COLONEL MORRIS GOINS, COMMANDER 1ST BATTALION  
12TH CAVALRY, MULTINATIONAL DIVISION-NORTH,  
DIYALA PROVINCE, IRAQ

MODERATOR: JACK HOLT, CHIEF, NEW MEDIA OPERATIONS

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THIS IS A RUSH TRANSCRIPT.

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LT. COL. GOINS: (In progress) -- to begin by saying that on the 27th of May,  
1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry -- (inaudible) -- commanded the Iraqi battalion, 1st Battalion,  
5th IA conducting the operation based on intelligence -- (off mike) -- us by local sheikhs  
as well as a few other sources that drove us toward a possible prisoner location. Once we  
began the operation, we encountered some al Qaeda -- some members which we engaged  
and destroyed from both direct fire and indirect -- (off mike) -- platforms.

Went into a small town named -- (name inaudible) -- which is south of Baqubah,  
southeastern portion of Baqubah, about 500 meters west of the town. An individual

approached us and helped narrow our focus for the search of the possible prison camps. Individuals had told us about 500 meters west. Conducted that operation and freed 41 personnel back to their families. Once we found the individuals, treated them for extreme dehydration, gave them some food, took them to nearest combat outpost. Lieutenant Colonel -- (name inaudible) -- provided some medical access, treated them and they were taken back to their homes the following day by Iraqi security forces and another Iraqi army unit.

Since then, we've conducted one additional operation -- or two additional operations looking for more prison camps, found and engaged and destroyed about five more al Qaeda individuals -- (off mike) -- in what seemed to be a tunnel, blockade complex, which we destroyed with HELLFIRE missiles, and IED-making material. And then yet today, just a few moments ago, conducted another operation with the Iraqi army, and it netted VBIEDs already rigged to blow, 18 mines -- I believe it was 10 -- 18 mines, about seven homemade explosive fire extinguishers, several IED-making platforms -- (off mike).

And every day we get more and more soldiers coming in to the Iraqi security forces or to coalition forces providing intel, which obviously drive their operations. (Off mike) -- the Iraqi people are getting tired of al Qaeda or ISI and coming -- (off mike) -- to the authorities to rid their country of the cancer that's better known as al Qaeda.

And I really -- (off mike) -- comments. If you guys have any questions, I'd be glad to answer them.

MR. HOLT: All right. Sounds good.

Steve Shippert, let's go ahead and start with you.

Q Okay. Thank you very much. Thank you, Colonel. Thank you for your service.

I have two questions that are really general in nature. I'm curious from your eyes, observation, what your take is or what your observations are about the state of al Qaeda and in and around Baqubah, considering that Diyala is essentially now the -- what I call the corporate headquarters for al Qaeda in Iraq after the fourth migration from Anbar.

And as a follow-on to that question, sir, in the same aspect, from your vantage point on the ground, if you could provide some input on the state of Diyala's grass-roots resistance to al Qaeda, the Diyala Salvation Council?

LT. COL. GOINS: I understand -- (off mike) -- the first question the state of al Qaeda inside of Diyala. The second question was the state of, and I believe you said, the council inside of Diyala. Is that correct?

Q Yeah, the Diyala -- (inaudible) -- Salvation Council, part of the Awakening -  
- essentially the grassroots local tribal leaders that are rising up, opposing al Qaeda  
openly. I find it personally interesting that it's a mix of Sunni and Shi'a alike.

LT. COL. GOINS: Gotcha.

To answer your first question, the state of al Qaeda in Diyala, the 42 individuals  
that we freed were a mix of people who worked for the government as well as day  
laborers. They ranged in age. The youngest one was 13 or 14 years old. He was  
detained for smoking. We had one case where an individual -- (inaudible) -- at gunpoint,  
out of the car, with his paralyzed daughter in the car. The individuals were being either  
used for ransom. The ransom, I think, was about 40,000. And it's not that big --  
(inaudible) -- either Iraqi security forces or against the local government itself.

And so what this shows in our analysis inside the battalion is that al Qaeda is  
almost coming to -- (inaudible). It has to use the Sunni population to gain money to  
finance their operation. In addition to that, they either torture them till they join the  
ranks, or they in some cases kill them, based on what some of the individuals that we  
freed gave us written statements on. So al Qaeda, I think, is fighting to hold onto itself. I  
mean, obviously if it's attacking Sunnis and kidnapping them, that's not a good thing in  
Iraq. So that's a plus in ours.

As far as your second question, the sheikhs stepping up against al Qaeda, same  
kind of thing: The sheikhs understand the hard concepts. They understand that there's a  
few rogue people out there. But the sheikhs are trying to -- (inaudible) -- out of their  
tribes, which vary in numbers from small to very large tribes, inside of Diyala, of up to  
200,000-plus. But in order to have a free Iraq, you must get rid of al Qaeda. The  
coalition forces are here to help secure Iraq, and we do that by cooperating with them.

We've conducted several community or neighborhood watches inside of Diyala.  
That has been working extremely well up in the river, Diyala River Valley, which is not  
in my battalion battlespace. In my space, I'm out towards the east border, a little town  
called Kanan (sp), out towards Balad Ruz, and it's south, down near a town called  
Narwan (sp).

In that area we had several -- (inaudible) -- trying to get to the table. We've had  
several peace accords with the sheikhs. And so they are coming to the table and they are  
beginning to (get the ?) folks to join the Iraqi police. I mean, in one case, one of the  
sheikhs was able to leverage, I think, 500 initially, and his target was a thousand to join  
the IP. (Inaudible) -- which is a subcommunity of people in the eastern portion of the  
city, folks have begun to join the IP there. So you see the sheikhs coming to the table and  
trying to get the tribes as a whole to support the government and provide security forces  
amongst themselves. Those are two good-news stories.

Q Thank you very much, sir.

MR. HOLT: Excellent. Okay.

Mark Finkelstein next.

Q Yes. Thank you.

Colonel Goins, it's a pleasure to speak with you. And congratulations on this mission.

Regarding the al Qaeda people that you either killed or captured, a couple of questions. First, were you able to determine their nationality? Were you able to determine how and, you know, where they entered Iraq from? And thirdly, we often hear about Iran funding or providing resources to various Shi'a groups in Iraq. You made reference to al Qaeda looking to Sunni sources for some funding. Can you say whether these are internal Sunni sources within Iraq, or is there evidence that there are sources from outside of Iraq, Sunni sources from outside of Iraq that somehow are providing funding to al Qaeda in Iraq?

LT. COL. GOINS: As far as the individuals we killed during the operation, the nationality right now is unknown. As far as if they're coming from outside, we have inside of Diyala and in my battlespace have killed -- (inaudible) -- that are from countries outside of Iraq. And as far as Iran funding Shi'a groups inside of Diyala, I don't know of any, but that doesn't mean it doesn't occur. It just means that I am aware of any.

We have seen some munitions come from outside of Iraq. The indications on some of the munitions point towards Iran, but on what scale I don't know.

Q And with respect to funding of al Qaeda in Iraq, have we been able to identify the sources of that funding coming from outside of Iraq?

LT. COL. GOINS: No, I have not been able to identify if funding comes outside of Iraq. What I do know is a standard practice for al Qaeda -- (inaudible) -- is to kidnap someone and then hold them for ransom. The individuals that we freed were held for what we -- (inaudible) -- 40,000 U.S. dollars, is what their ransom was. And I know that the common practice once al Qaeda kidnaps -- (inaudible) -- that individual and they use them for ransom.

Q So they are apparently doing some self-funding through kidnapping and other means within the country.

LT. COL. GOINS: Yes.

Q Okay, thank you.

MR. HOLT: All right. Jeff.

Q Colonel, thanks for being here. One of the two questions that I have right up front is, how are you doing as far as locating, targeting and actually speaking with the reconcilables that you see inside the different areas, sectarian insurgent groups in your area?

LT. COL. GOINS: My understanding of the question is how am I targeting al Qaeda through local sources. Did I understand that correctly?

Q No, no. How are you doing as far as actually targeting and meeting with and working to convert those that you see as being reconcilable inside of other insurgent cells outside of al Qaeda.

LT. COL. GOINS: Oh, okay. I personally have not. I have -- there's one -- (inaudible) -- city, it belongs to another battalion currently, although I'm going to move back (into it ?) possibly over the next few weeks. But I do know of a case where one of the battalion commanders is working with an organization that is coming back under the -- (audio break) -- reconsolidation and moving forward in Iraq. He's been working with them for the last three or four weeks. We do know more than likely that we've killed some of theirs, and more than likely, kind of they've conducted offensive operations against ours. But we are bringing them to the table and they are working with us hand in hand providing us vital information.

As far as personally, inside of my battalion's battlespace, I have not as of yet. But as I said a moment ago, once I move back (into the city ?) the likelihood is that that will change.

Q Sir, what you're seeing -- are you seeing mostly a willingness to actually band together against the common enemy of al Qaeda, rather than a common enemy of the coalition? Is that starting to be a little bit of a movement towards that direction?

LT. COL. GOINS: Correct. People are, again, tired of al Qaeda and other organizations, because as I tell the sheikhs and the local leaders, as we can -- (inaudible) -- controls non-kinetic operations, show me the first school or first hospital or anything decent that al Qaeda or ISI has done for the Iraqi people. And I can show a laundry list of projects, water, schools, that the coalition forces have done, to include the Iraqi security forces. So we use that as a tool. And I think that the locals are getting tired of either al Qaeda or ISI. People are coming to the table realizing that it's better to be at the table and chat, talk to -- (inaudible) -- standing at the end of a weapon.

MR. HOLT: Very good. And we've got -- I got some extended time on the call here, so if you've got any follow-ups, gentlemen, we'll just open it up for general discussion.

Q I have one. This is Mark Finkelstein again from NewsBusters. Colonel, how would you assess the al Qaeda element that you engaged and destroyed in terms of their

training, their equipment, their tactical ability, et cetera? Is this a considerable foe, or are they more ragtag? You know, how would you assess them?

LT. COL. GOINS: As far as the engagement to free the hostages, not very organized at all. And it was a pretty -- (inaudible) -- engagement, really, although there were several areas.

As far as our opponents, are they trained or do they use -- (word inaudible) -- maneuver? Do they have some kind of a command and control platform or structure and any elements? In some cases, you have seen that. We've seen it in some of -- (inaudible) -- eastern portion of Baqubah, but not on a grand scale. And we have seen some down in -- (inaudible) -- Turkey, which has conducted about -- (inaudible) -- (73 ?) Cav Squad had conducted an operation there a few months ago. We did see (organized ?) bomb maneuver elements, in essence -- (inaudible) -- structure, but that element no longer exists.

But in some cases you do. In the majority of the cases, you really do not see a command and control structure on the grand scale that the U.S. Army has.

Q A quick follow-up. To the extent that you can discuss it practically, how were you able to destroy the captors without harming the hostages?

LT. COL. GOINS: We have platforms that provided pretty decent eyes and ears. And once we've begun our operations -- the ground force commander was me, but the subordinate company commanders are there on the ground. (And it's then delaying ?) it between what targets what, and we engaged between -- (inaudible) -- fire and our anti-weapons team.

Q Mm-hmm. Did you say "air weapons"?

LT. COL. GOINS: Air weapons team --

Q Can you identify what types of air weapon platforms were involved?

LT. COL. GOINS: I'm sorry. Say again?

Q Are you able to identify what types of aircraft were involved?

LT. COL. GOINS: UH-60 -- eight UH-64s -- excuse me -- which are the Apaches, and -- were in support of our operation, as well as UAV platforms.

Q Uh-huh. Okay. Thank you.

LT. COL. GOINS: And in some cases, fixed-wing aircraft.

Q Uh-huh.

Q Colonel, with the -- I know this was asked at your press conference last week and it wasn't -- it's not the easiest question to answer, but with the increase of forces and the increase in the Baghdad security plan, how much, if at all, have you noticed an increase not only in al Qaeda personnel but in, I guess, the -- an increase in the ruthlessness or desperation seen in the activities of al Qaeda who are moving into your area?

LT. COL. GOINS: In the Baghdad security plan, you know, I have a few peers that are battalion commanders in Baghdad, and I -- (inaudible) -- unlimited television, but what I can tell you -- in kind of our battlespace, we do seem to see a little bit more movement of al Qaeda inside of our battlespace.

In some cases, you know, reports of, you know, masked men with weapons systems, mortar tubes -- and obviously when we see that or hear that, then we've got -- (inaudible) -- and conduct operations there and go after them.

You'll see some cases -- VBIEDs have increased in our battlespace, and that's why we were out conducting the operations today. And we found that -- one VBIED and several other home-made explosives and some AP mines. (Still ?) that just causes us pick up and conduct a little bit more aggressive operations for a short period of time and then obviously conduct operations yet again, based on -- (inaudible) -- intelligence that's coming from sources that we are able to leverage more and more every day -- either coming straight to us or to the Iraqi security forces.

But you know, in some cases we have in some areas seen an increase in al Qaeda activity, and in some cases we have not. And that's why we're trying to leverage the sheikhs to come to the table and trying to get the local people to step up and join the Iraqi police department, which you see more and more occurring every day.

MR. HOLT: Very good. Thank you very much, Colonel. We appreciate you taking the time to be with us today. And hopefully we can do this again. And good luck on what you're doing, and thanks again for your service.

LT. COL. GOINS: We try. We try every day.

Q Thank you, Colonel.

Q Thanks, Colonel.

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